

Lehi Opera House

By Carl Mellor

The Lehi Opera House, located where Pioneer copy is today was built in 1887. Louis Garff, built a two story building, the bottom floor for his mercantile store, and an upstairs for an entertainment center. Building first opened on Christmas eve, 1887, with a grand ball attended by over 400 people.

In 1888, Danquart Weggeland, who painted the murals for the inside for the Salt Lake Temple painted the six sets of scenery for the Lehi Opera House.

The popular business was the object of tax revenues for Lehi City. In 1889, Louis Graff asked for a rebate on his taxes paid to Lehi City. They accounted for nearly 50% of his gross revenues. Local theatrical groups produced popular stage shows regularly. Traveling national theatre productions came regularly. They would arrive by railroad and in large trunks transport, not only costumes and stage equipment, but also special curtains and backdrops.

In 1894, Rusco and Swift's production of the immortal "Uncle Tom's Cabin" played here. In 1892, ten men lost their hats at the theater, causing a community concern on the security of patron's property while attending the theater. At the turn of the century, moving pictures were taking over the live productions.

In 1912, George Garff announced plans to remodel the theater and use the bottom floor as the main hall with portions of the second floor as a balcony. An orchestra pit and larger stage were a part of the new theater.

In 1915, Garff leased the building to three men who in 1916, skipped the state leaving Garff with unpaid bills. Garff lost the theater as well as his mercantile business due to foreclosure to the State Bank of Lehi.

John Bradshaw and Gerald Turner, owners of the Lehi Drug Company purchased the theater from the bank, built a new drug store just to the west and

leased the theater to the Co-op.

In 1928, the Co-op sold both the Royal Theater and the National Theater (as the Opera House was then known) to a Mr. Houston, who within a year sold both theaters to John Miller.

In 1946, Cleon Leany opened the Utah Theater to a capacity crowd of over 400 people. The Utah Theater remained in business, except for a few years closure until 1959. In 1962, Abe Ekins purchased the building and tore it down to make way for the new Lehi Drug Store. Later the Drug Store became the Pioneer Party and Copy.